DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 198 132 SP 017 542

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TITLE Interaction Partner System: A Design for Professional Collaboration. Overview.
INSTITUTION University of West Florida, Pensacola. Educational Research and Development Center.
PUB DATE 78
NOTE 8p.

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS College Credits; *Inservice Teacher Education; *Interaction; *Peer Relationship; Postsecondary Education; *Preservice Teacher Education; Schools of Education; Teacher Behavior; *Teacher Education Programs; Teacher Participation

ABSTRACT

The Interaction Partner System (IPS) was designed and implemented by the Okaloosa County Teacher Corps Project and the University of West Florida. It was an answer to several dilemmas: teacher isolation, irrelevant and inflexible teacher inservice training, and theories and research developed at the graduate level which rarely found their way into the schools. By enabling preservice and inservice teachers to focus together on common concerns within a site school, the IPS attempted to achieve four goals: to create positive change in teacher behavior; to offer a research option for earning inservice credit; to encourage immediate applicability of the developed research designs; and to provide a model for teacher education centers and colleges of education. Each degree program participant was asked to solicit the involvement of another teacher within the school, providing the following incentives: freedom to alter general school and class schedules; use of substitute teachers and materials needed for research; and letters of commendation for their files. Special guidelines were laid out, and each student kept a log of the interaction and the length of each encounter. One inservice credit was awarded to participating teachers for each hour of involvement. (FG)

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UWF/OKALOOSA COUNTY
TEACHER CORPS '78

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INTERACTION PARTNER SYSTEM: A DESIGN FOR PROFESSIONAL COLLABORATION

OVERVIEW

No one doubts that people do better work when they feel supported. In organizations, however, support is easy to talk about and hard to achieve. No where is that fact more evident than in schools. Most teachers we know feel harried and isolated, not supported. In our judgement, the support problem is neither superficial nor temporary but deep and fundamental in the structure of the American school. The attached program, The Interaction Partner System (IPS), is our answer to a multiple dilemma: teacher isolationism, irrelevant and inflexible teacher inservice, and finally theoretical research from graduate studies in education which rarely finds its way into the schools. The IPS extends options and promise in each of these areas.

The UWF/Okaloosa County Teacher Corps Project, committed to the goal of changing teacher behavior, ambitiously endeavored at its site schools to include all teachers in its professional development design by delivering a graduate program to the site school. However, all did not choose to pursue the graduate degree. Impacting upon this latter group was an inservice plan that would parallel the graduate program's concepts and objectives as well as attempt to address the individual and professional needs and interests of those teachers not enrolled for graduate credit. This unique plan for the coupling of inservice and preservice was entitled The Interaction Partner System (IPS): A Design for Professional Collaboration.

The IPS is a method of informal professional involvement of two or more teachers focusing on a common concern with the site school. Under this system,

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a degree program teacher seeks active assistance, involvement and commitment from a co-worker or interested teacher on various tasks or topics undertaken in the degree program that have immediate, on-site relevancy.

The IPS has four major goals:

1. To create positive change in teacher behavior by:
   a. Facilitating professional growth by collaborative interaction on a current master degree activity for the purpose of problem solving, decision making and curriculum designing.
   b. Increasing communication among individual school faculty members.
   c. Improving and providing opportunities to practice team building skills.
2. To provide a model for the institutionalization of the IPS process for teacher education centers and colleges of education.
3. To offer a site-specific, problem-oriented research option to teachers for earning inservice credit.
4. To encourage the immediate applicability of research designs which focus on problem solving in the schools.

During the second year of the Teacher Corps' degree program each participant was required to identify a specialization component which consisted of one major activitiy identified as a Thesis, a Practicum or an Action Research. Each of these options involved the development and implementation of a task, or series of tasks of interest to individual teachers and were specifically designed to meet the needs of the site schools. The subject of the major specialization activity may be part or all of a previously planned startegy or an original on-going activity designed by a teacher team for meeting mutally shared objectives. The originality, design and implementation of the activity rests primarily with teachers themselves.

Germain to the overall project, is the Interaction Partner System's multiple functionality. First and foremost, it provides the means for a site-delivered

inservice program by working "within" the pre-existing structure rather than "outside" it. Second and possibly as important, the system creates a "school-wide laboratory" environment while it simultaneously generates its own validation. Third, the system presents a framework for the actualization of on-going school improvement. Finally, the system produces a positive, professional school climate.

DESCRIPTION

The graduate degree program enrolled thirty-four participants from the Baker and Holt faculties and communities. Four of this number were Teacher Corps Interns and two were parents from the Baker community. Each degree participant was asked to solicit the involvement of another teacher within the schools as a means of facilitating additional and improved communication encouraging professional development in problem solving and decision making relative to instructional matters and providing an alternative strategy for securing inservice credits usable in renewing certification. In addition to earning credits applicable for certification renewal, three other tangible incentives were negotiated in collaboration with the school district, the local schools and the university. Those incentives are as follows: (1) freedom to alter general school and class time schedules to meet specific needs, (2) availability of limited funds for substitute teachers and/or materials necessary in the work of partners, and (3) letters of commendation written by the Baker School principal with copies placed in permanent personnel files.

Twenty-four teachers and administrators agreed to serve as partners to the graduate degree participants. (Each partnership was characterized according to the needs and personalities of those involved.) Specific guidelines were not laid out to govern the interactions within partnerships but a log was kept by the graduate degree participant. This log was to contain, as a minimum, the names of individuals within the partnership, the nature of each specific interaction, as well as the date and length of time of each encounter.

Examples of the functioning of the Interaction Partner System are presented in the following log excerpts.

1. The Interaction Partner System is valuable to participating individuals both from a standpoint of resource acquisition and human relations. One degree

program participant working with a pilot Parenting Workshop Series chose as her partners the entire parenting workshop enrollees. She sought their opinions on various games and manipulatives which she was in the process of selecting for the Improvement of Reading seminar in which she was enrolled. Their interaction covered a period of five weeks. The value of this collaboration is best illustrated in a quote from the log . . . "The ideas and suggestions are fantastic. They are basic and down-to-earth things I can do. I am using the ideas and materials with my own children and with my nursery school." Her log concluded with . . . "This was a most enjoyable thing. I was really glad to share, and the mothers seemed to really appreciate seeing the activities."

II. Log excerpts in which partners focused on "Topics in Math" document the range of activities which the Interaction Partner System's flexible construct allows. In the case of two degree program participants, who shared the same interaction partner, such activities as "discussed possibilities", "planned together", "organized everything", and "made math games" were reported.

III. Finally the direct relationship between IPS, professional growth and organizational improvement is illuminated in the IPS logs from an action research project entitled "A Combined Language Experience, VAKT, and Choral Reading Approach to Teaching Title I Second Graders to Read". The following interactions were reported:

---Handouts were shared and discussed with partner from the graduate seminar on Evaluation Techniques.

---My partner had input into helping me construct a comprehension and skills reading test for fifth graders, covering objectives taught this year . . We administered and scored the test for our individual groups. This data will be used for planning next year's program.

---We shared the Learning Style Inventory and discussed how the categories within it affect the students we teach.

---My partner and I exchange ideas and any new knowledge which will be beneficial to us in our field of teaching. We meet before and after school, at break time, and at lunch. A lot of collaboration goes on while we are teaching since we teach in the same lab.

Once the Interaction Partner System's concept was undertaken, efforts were extended by the university and the local schools to seek approval of the system as an alternative means of earning inservice credit within the jurisdiction of the Teacher Education Center of the school district (as a means of earning inservice credit.) Approval was granted to award one inservice credit for each one hour of involvement.

At the end of each quarter of graduate work, a summary parternship accomplishments was reported. These quarterly reports were compiled by the degree program director and submitted to the district Teacher Education Center Director. At the end of the first year of implementation, one hundred and fifty-four inservice credits were awarded to twenty-four teachers not in the graduate degree program.

In addition to these teachers, a number of logs reported partnership and involvement other than for those persons who wanted inservice credit and with individuals beyond the teachers within the specific schools, i.e., volunteers, parents, retired teachers.

Partnerships were conceived to be dynamic in nature. Individuals joined together around common goals and needs which emerged from the graduate courses and activities.

The second year of the field based, graduate program involves an activity which is more static and complex in nature than regular coursework. Each degree program participant undertakes a specialization project which results in the form of either a thesis, an action research or a practicum. In each case the project is undertaken with the collaborative agreement of the school principal,

the graduate degree program director, the Teacher Corps Project Director and an individual university professor who serves as the director of the specialization project.

Six university professor have been identified according to the expertise which each holds to direct these specialization projects. The responsibility for directing these projects has been recognized by the university through the allocation of 'regular loads' for the involvement. Each professor is assigned one-sixth of an FTE for directing six degree program participants who will be working with other members of the school faculty not in the graduate degree program.

It is the responsibility but not the requirement of each graduate degree participant to select an interaction partner, keep a log of those interactions, and verify the date and amount of time. Likewise, it is the responsibility of the university professors who are directing the specialization projects to foster the most profitable partnerships possible for carrying out and completing the specialization projects. The graduate degree program director collects, summarizes and reports all data on the partnership involvements to the school district Teacher Education Center Director. He, in turn, awards all inservice credits.

The Interaction Partner System as designed and implemented by the Okaloosa County Florida school district and the University of West Florida Teacher Corps graduate degree program is adaptable for teacher inservice in all school districts and universities. A design such as the Interaction Partner System encourages collaborative, professional development and relevance in research.